

‘White trash’ in the ‘basket of deplorables’: Continued crisis of men in America

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Abstract: The ‘post-truth’ society has produced a compound of two sets of *new revolutionaries*: We have known about the ‘white trash’ for about 400 years. The ‘deplorables’ represent the new Hillbillies left out by the ravages of globalized economy; ‘basement dwellers’ are reluctant liberals unable to confront the new realities of a hopelessly divided nation.

Keywords: ‘white trash’; ‘basket of deplorables’; crisis; America

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Introduction

—The truth is what makes possible to exclude; to separate what is dangerously mixed; to distribute the inside and outside properly; to trace the boundaries between what is pure and what is impure.... The truth henceforth forms part of the great juridical, religious, and moral rituals required by the city. A city without truth is a threatened city. Threatened by mixtures, impurities, unfulfilled exclusions. The city needs the truth as a principle of division. It needs discourses of truth as it needs those who maintain the divisions.”

Michel Foucault, March 17, 1971 (2011: 187)

Gunnar Myrdal famously wrote that the American Creed is good but its practice is unjust and unfair. Hillary Clinton expressed “agret” for comments in which she said “half” of her rival’s supporters are “deplorable”, meaning people who are racist, sexist, homophobic or xenophobic¹.

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/09/politics/hillary-clinton-donald-trump-basket-of-deplorables/> (Accessed October 4, 2016)

Prescience of Marx’s 23-page pamphlet dated February 1984 has haunted the post-modern world. The “post-truth” society has produced a compound of two sets of *new revolutionaries*: We have known about the ‘white trash’ for about 400 years. The ‘deplorables’ represent the new Hillbillies left out by the ravages of globalized economy; ‘basement dwellers’ are reluctant liberals unable to confront the new realities of a hopelessly divided nation. And the millennial ‘socialists’! The underlying commonality between the two is the perversion of a perpetual class war ingrained in the DNA of our society. How ironic is it that Donald Trump and Bernard Sanders, on the right and the left, became the champions of the poor, victims of a “rigged economy”?

‘Post-truth’ reality is an antithesis of ‘post-material praxis’ that I wrote about earlier (Mohan, 1992)².

² The term was first used by David Roberts, then a blogger on an environmentalist website, Grist—as a modish myth invented by *de-haut-en-bas* liberal sand sore losers ignorant of dirty a business politics has always been”; The *Economist* is tempted to dismiss the idea of ‘post-truth’ political discourse” (Art of the Lie: Post-truth politics in the age of social media, September 10-16, 2016: 17). I emphasized the nexus of ‘post-material values’ and social praxis — social media was not dominant at that time — in a world ravaged by euphemisms of falsehood.

American anxiety, avarice, and atavism existed even prior to *the birth of a nation*. Nancy Isenberg, the author of *Fallen Founder*, masterfully brings out —the 400-year untold history of class in America” (2016³). The historian contends:

—The poor, the waste, the rubbish, as they are variously labeled, have stood front and center during America’s most formative political contests. During colonial settlement, they were useful pawns as well as rebellious troublemakers, a pattern that persisted amid class migration and landless squatters westward across the continent. Southern poor whites figured prominently in the rise of Abraham Lincoln’s Republican Party, and in the atmosphere of distrust that caused bad blood to percolate among the poorer classes within the Confederacy during the Civil War. White trash were dangerous outliers in efforts to rebuild the Union during Reconstruction; and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, when the eugenics movement flourished, they were the class of degenerates targeted for sterilization. On the flip side, poor whites were beneficiaries of rehabilitative efforts during the New Deal in LBJ’s ‘Great Society.’” (Isenberg, 2016: xv)

American social scientists in general have downplayed the role of class in critiquing stratification of society⁴. Race, gender, and lately LGBT, issues have dominated discourses on the human condition. Michel Foucault was right: Karl Marx was the founder of ‘discourse’. It is therefore imperative to talk about the genealogy of ‘class’. When Patrick Moynihan characterized the black family as a flawed institution, he was basically ‘blaming the victim’. No wonder, *Blaming the Victim* and *Culture of Poverty* have shaped much of public and social discourse in America⁵. Since other countries, by and large, look up for American innovations and ideas, the impact of these two pernicious views can be overlooked only at the expense of truth.

nse of truth.

History though written by victors always unravels truth and untruth. Nancy Isenberg’s *White Trash* unfolds this reality beyond the ideological fog and conundrums of time. Erick Foner’s work has tremendously impressed me. I make no pretense to be historian but I have great respect for history. In *Development, Poverty of Culture and Social Policy*, I made a modest attempt to demystify the inconvenient sociology of a welfare system (Mohan, 2011). Alvin Gouldner succinctly observed:

—The old society maintains itself also through theories and ideologies that establish its hegemony over the minds of men. Who therefore do not merely bite their tongues but submit to it willingly. It will be impossible either to emancipate men from the old society or to build a new one, without beginning, here and now, the construction of a total counter-culture, including new social theories; and it is impossible to do this without a critique of the social theories dominant today.” (1971: 5).

The politics of social theory is fraught with conflicts. Critical social theory, Russell Keat (1981: 1–2) argues, —differs significantly both from the positivistic conception of social science, and from the main historical alternative to this, the hermeneutic or interpretive tradition....Scientific knowledge, positivistically conceived, is inherently repressive, and contributes to the maintenance of a form of society in which science is one of the resources employed for the domination of one class by another, and in which the possibilities for a radical transformation towards a more rational society are blocked and concealed”.

Inequality in the World

Human evolution is a history of strife, survival and conquest. Post-industrial societies with emphasis on production, profit and scientific advancements did succeed in raising material resources but could not resolve poverty and inequality, let alone annihilate them. No wonder open-market economies created Silicon Valleys and transformed feudal-colonial systems into flourishing economies (India and China) without annihilating the scourges of inequality. This paradoxical state of development implies that quest for equality is a romantic fallacy since poverty persists despite

³ I am grateful to Nancy Isenberg and her publisher for the permission to comment of her work (personal communication, September 20, 2016).

⁴ —One reason for Marx’s relative obscurity is that only toward the end of his life did movements to improve conditions for workers begin gains in Europe and the United States.” (Menand, 2016: 90)

⁵ http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/opinion/letters/article_cb-562958-4872-11e6-8b20-773e1328a95d.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=user-share

growth.

Sex, food, and war have been constants in the dynamics of human-societal evolution. There was no slavery in caves. Primitive innocence, if it ever existed, did not last long. As soon as property and agriculture were invented, Rousseauian innocence vanished. It seems hard not to recognize the inherent-, cultural-, wiring- mechanisms that perpetuate inequality and injustice. The emphasis here is on *invincible environmental imperatives* — genesis of *‘class’* rather than Darwinian determinism.

From terrorism to street violence, corporate rapaciousness to domestic brutality, and casteism to classism, one finds the imprints of an incomplete *homo sapiens* masquerading as a civilized global citizen. Malcolm Potts and his coauthor Thomas Hayden (2008) scientifically bring home the duality of *‘biology of war and peace’*.

—The world is very clearly divided into *‘haves’* and *‘have-nots.’* About one billion people live on less than one dollar a day, while the richest 20 percent of the global population earn three quarters of the global income. In 2007, the two wealthiest individuals in the world had more money than combined GDP of the 45 poorest countries. The terrorists who have attacked the West, and who no doubt will do again, act largely because they live in a world of frustrated dreams. Their fundamentalist interpretations of religion and radical political philosophies offer an illusion of hope. Any of us might be attracted to such a perspective if we lived in the same environment.” (Malcolm and Thomas, 2008: 354)

The Marxist vision of a classless society was shattered by Stalins and Maos who championed the cause of their proletarian folks. Marx’s egalitarian utopia of a class-less society was basically an international manifesto. Marx did not fully appreciate the power of human-social nativity. Each revolution brought a brutal dictator. Their surrogates have brought much pain and misery in the name of liberation. Gender and class injustices persist; global inequalities deepen. I seriously doubt if IBM’s *Dr Watson* and *‘cognitive computing’* can ever wipe out this inhuman condition.

It is the empowerment of women that still has promise to promote the cultural-biology of peace. Objectification of women as a reality and metaphor will only reinvent a billionaire fascist who brags of groping women on the way to the White House^{6,7}.

Columnist George Will, quoting Nicholas Eberstad, concludes: “Reversing social regression is more difficult than casing it. One manifestation of regression, Donald Trump, is perhaps perverse evidence that some of his army of angry men are at least healthily unhappy about the loss of meaning, self-esteem and masculinity that is a consequence of chosen and protracted idleness” (Will, 2016: 7B). Eberstad thinks policy innovations can reverse this *‘social emasculation’* which is unwelcome *‘American Exceptionalism’* (Eberstad, 2016⁸; quoted by Will, 2016).

Perverse regression is not a sudden event. Will believes in Oscar Lewis’s *Culture of Poverty* (1961; 1965) that I refute. My thesis of *poverty of culture* is —an argument against the prevailing orthodoxies and practices that partake in social sciences.... The poor, marginalized, underdeveloped peoples in the Global South present serious challenges to the credibility of globalization in the post-American World. ...” (Mohan, 2011: xv).

Mass criminalization of marginalized groups is product of predatory chauvinism and its abominable manifestations. Modern penalty, in this age of terror, has become a new *‘law and order’* morality. The state’s monopoly over this exclusive authority has been challenged by the anti-state movements, embodied in ISIS and its offshoots. In the States, far-right groups are no less aggressive. There are more than 400 organized units in US that profess white-racist ideas. From tea-partiers and birthers to home grown secessionists, the evilness of state is nihilistic anarchism which is always practiced at the expense of powerless people. Superiority of race is a

⁶ http://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/09/us/politics/donald-trump-campaign.html?emc=edit_th_20161009&nl=todaysheadlines&lid=72603810 (Accessed October 9, 2016).

⁷ The second presidential debate, October 9, 2016, was dark and vulgar; it set the new low in cultural swamps of American politics. See, http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/donald-trump-narcissist-creep-loser?mbid=nl_161010_Daily&CNDID=40380448&spMailingID=9663054&spUserID=MTMzMTg0NzY3MTk5S0&spJobID=1020760310&spReportId=MTAyMDc2MDMxMAS2 (Accessed October 10, 2016).

⁸ <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/440807/men-without-work-nicholas-ebersadts-new-book-examines-family-erosion> (Accessed October 9, 2016)

fascist version of class. It puzzles me when I hear educated people in the US praising Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs — an extrajudicial killing spree — in Philippines⁹.

—We witness not merely to the internationalization of class conflict but to the transformation of the structure of class," writes Norman Birnbaum (1998: 38). The most enlightened view of evolutionary — not revolutionary! — class structure is summed up by Edward O. Wilson:

—The most complex forms of social organizations are made from high levels of cooperation. They are furthered with altruistic acts performed by at least some of the colony members. The highest level of cooperation and altruism is that of eusociality, in which some colony members surrender part or all of their personal reproduction in order to increase reproduction by the —royal" caste specialized by that purpose" (Wilson, 2013: 61).

Eusociality may have transformed caste into class. The functional hierarchy of the production-ownership-distribution machine is actually an acceptance of the inbuilt inequality that creates both perceptual and organizational barriers amongst people. —Your class determines how you look at your fellow creatures."¹⁰ A new class war masquerades in varied cultural forms and colors designed by divisive ideologies.

Religious fundamentalism and political correctness, in many ways, practice a populist penalty which borders on omni-disciplinarity that Michel Foucault brilliantly talked about. Foucault changed the way we ought to assess the promiscuous quality of our culture. In his classic *Discipline and Punish*, he describes the monastic model in reference to the discipline of workshop.

—The prison must be the microcosm of a perfect society in which individuals are isolated in their moral

existence, but in which they come together in strict hierarchical framework, with no lateral relation, communication being possible in a vertical direction" (Foucault, 1995: 238). Pakistan, a nuclear power, honor killings and export of terror is not uncommon. In India, the world's largest democracy and aspiring world power, a Dalit, usually a man, may be lynched for loving a high caste man or woman. In the Middle East, *amongst the believers'*, one never knows what happens to you if you are from the West. In the US, you—a black man—are not safe should you be walking in a decent area. From Ferguson, MS to Baton Rouge, LA, we have seen the horrors of a divided nation. Americans prefer security at the expense of their creed. That is sad. The reward and recognition system is so capriciously fraught that crooked ones usually win most of the time¹¹ which widens the gulf between the poor and the rich. The duality of 1% and 99% is a callous reality.

“White Trash” Psyche in America

No one could have imagined what Wells Fargo did to its clients¹². It is interesting Wells Fargo generously supported *Social Work's* 60th anniversary issue dealing with *'fiscal capability and asset development'* to *take up the challenge of advancing economic and social justice for all"*. (*Social Work*, October 2016: 295) This Wall Street approach to achieving social and economic justice is the greatest fraud in the history of professional education. Instead of being a candle, Social Work has become a mirror of a corrupt system¹³.

White Trash, Isenberg succinctly point out, sustains the foundations of an unequal society. Note how the world's mightiest nation uses its people to maintain a rigged and rotten system:

—Job opportunities for all — the myth of full employment — is just a myth. The economy

⁹ —The President is unapologetic about his grim campaign and its fallout. *'Rich or poor, I do not give a sh-t.'* Duterte said at a recent press conference. *'My order is to destroy'* —*Time*, October 10, 2016: 49.

¹⁰ —Dr. Dietze's and Knowles's own view is that the upper classes pay less attention because they believe random strangers have little to offer. Perhaps one way to test their hypothesis would be to return their experiment at a Buckingham Palace garden party." (*The Economist*, October 15, 2016: 76)

¹¹ Louisiana State University lost a game of football; it fired its coach next day. The coach still got his \$9000000.00! A prestigious bank, Wells Fargo, cheated millions of its customers. Its manger still ended with \$247 Million of his bonds (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/28/business/dealbook/wells-fargo-john-stumpf-compensation.html>; accessed 10/12/2016).

¹² <http://money.cnn.com/2016/09/20/investing/wells-fargo-elizabeth-warren-resign-criminal-investigation/index.html?iid=EL> (Accessed October 14, 2016).

¹³ My address to the 4th Congress of *National Association of Professional Social Workers in India*, October 22, 2016; <https://vimeo.com/188037219>.

cannot provide employment for every one.... Modern America's reserve army of the poor are drummed into the worst jobs, the worst-paid positions, and provide the labor force that works in coal mines, cleans toilets and barn stalls, picks and plucks in field as migrant laborers, or slaughter animals. Waste people remain the mudsills who fill out the bottom layer of the labor pool on which society's wealth rests. *Poor whites are still taught to hate — not to hate those who are keeping them in line*" (2016: 315; emphasis mine).

Myths, misinformation, and mendacity pervert truth. Higher education, which has commoditized values, knowledge and skills itself, looks like a slaughter house of ideals. Having lived in Louisiana for more than four decades, *I found how low the higher ups go when they feel threatened by the rivals of 'white trash.'* (See, Mohan, 2002: 122–159¹⁴; also, Foucault, 2011: 186–189)

It's ironic that society's wretched ones should be the foundational protectors of their own perpetrators. It's more than Marxian false-consciousness. What Vedic scholars called *karma* and *dharma*, a destined cycle of life and death wrapped in a trans- migratory journey, is actually an evolutionary-functional¹⁵ process. Revolutions come and go. Each revolutionary epoch leaves behind collaterally damaged people. They sustain the chains that enslave them. Perhaps, in fashion unfreedom as a bribe for self-perpetuation" (Becker, 1975: 49). Norman Brown (1959: 251) sums it up: the emergence of social privilege marks the Fall of Man, the Fall took place not in the transition of from primitive communism to private property but in the transition from ape to man".

Psychoanalytically viewed, *white trash* is rooted in the American psyche. I am tempted to cite a few lines that portray the hidden violence in the tales of these white trash people:

Robert] Byrd referred to people on welfare as fornicating deadbeats.... Carter still had to run a redneck campaign in order to win...

¹⁴ Ch. IV, Sociology of social work: Historializing truth. (Ch. 122-159)

¹⁵ *Varna* (color-based) system is the core of age-old caste system of spiritualized hierarchies of haves and have-nots — a permanent, impregnable system of inbuilt inequality.

[James] Dickey reinvented himself as the child of hillbillies... [His] novel published in 1970, was a tortured exploration of lost manhood, an attempt to recover his inner hillbilly.... In this psychosexual thriller, the dandified city folk aren't merely given their comeuppance; they are forced to rediscover their primal instincts.... Dickey's story had its giant appeal because the search he described found expression elsewhere in American society." (Quoted from Isenberg, 2016: 279–280)

The impact and influence of James Dickey's *Deliverance*, has been phenomenal; it is counter-culture-classic. *The New York Times* selected it as one of *The Best 1,000 Movies Ever Made*. What we see today is return of the upscale rednecks challenging the establishment with wish-fulfilling mantras of change. Racial injustice, inequality, and poverty are scourges that sustain class as an inalienable condition. *Redneck Roots* are as American as its pie. No Trumpian revolution can transform it into Bernie Sanders' socialism.

Nancy Isenberg's *White Trash* is courageously vivid portrayal of American history that must be a required reading for all Americans. Doubtless its significance cannot be overstated in the Post-American World. History validates that the basket of adorable" always had holes. A creed without deed is a fanciful dream.

Inequality predates classism. The rhetoric of our time," concludes Louis Menand, the time of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump, Brexit, and popular unrest in Europe. Appears to have a Marxist cast.... In the terms used everywhere today, on the left and on the right, and in the press: the system is rigged" to reward the elites". Marx called them the ruling class" (Menand, 2016: 96).

Conclusion

We may not presentize history; history does presentize the historical man"¹⁶. Becker, in line with Paul Radin's view of growth of privilege in the primitive world, is not incorrect. Rousseau's intuitive discourse (1955) still holds water about the fall of men from innocence to class and states. We live in a flawed society as incomplete social animals. Our social arrangements and institutions are in state of disarray.

¹⁶ See Becker, E. 1975: 61.

*I drink not from mere joy in wine not to scoff
at faith — no, only to forget myself for a mo-
ment, that only do I want intoxication, that
alone.*

--Omar Khayyam

Conflict of interest

The author declares no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article

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